

**DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME**<http://www.dfg.ca.gov>

MARINE REGION

20 Lower Ragsdale Drive, Suite 100

Monterey, California 93940

(831) 649-2870



November 7, 2003

Dear Marine Fishery Participants and Interested and Affected Parties:

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) took recent action that will be noticed in the Federal Register by the National Marine Fisheries Service to prohibit recreational and commercial fishing for groundfish off the west coast, including California. The Council made three specific exceptions: allowable groundfish fisheries include recreational fishing for sanddabs, commercial trawling for petrale sole, and commercial hook-and-line fishing for sanddabs. Other actions restrict certain commercial fishing to specific depths.

The Department was poised to close several nearshore rockfish fisheries due to harvest limits being met and is now taking closure action to also conform to the Council decision, pursuant to Title 14, CCR §189. This letter is being sent to provide you with a formal notice of these actions as required by regulation.

**The recreational fishery for lingcod, rockfish, and California scorpionfish will be closed effective 12:01 AM Friday, November 21, 2003** for the remainder of the year pursuant to Title 14, CCR §27.82. In addition, **the California sheephead commercial fishery will be closed** for the same time period pursuant to Title 14, CCR §52.10. The closures will apply to respective recreational and commercial angling and diving activity in all state waters, and include all methods of take.

Fishery sampling information indicates that a large number of recreational anglers caught an unexpectedly high number of fish just after the season for rockfish, lingcod, cabezon and greenling opened this year south of Cape Mendocino (Humboldt County). This was particularly true for black rockfish, gopher rockfish, and lingcod. Increased catch rates are likely due to regulations that restricted angling to waters less than 120 feet where these species are common and higher than normal effort. Coupled with fish landed in northern California in early 2003 where the season was open, and fish caught in central and southern parts of the state prior to the open season, the annual limits have been or are about to be reached.

Based on projections from recent recreational catch estimates derived from the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS), the California recreational set aside of 1,097,870 pounds of nearshore rockfishes will be taken or exceeded by the closure date. Commercial California sheephead landings data thru November 5 indicate the allocation of 87,959 pounds will be taken or exceeded by the closure date.

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The Department will be requesting that the Fish and Game Commission consider emergency action to close recreational fishing for ocean whitefish and other federal groundfish species (all species addressed in the federal Groundfish Management Plan, excluding sanddabs) to also be effective on November 21, 2003. These actions are intended to reduce bycatch of species in the closed fisheries mentioned above and to conform to the Council groundfish decisions. Anglers are advised to check the Department's website for the most up to date regulations at [www.dfg.ca.gov/mrd](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/mrd). For more complete information on the full scope of Council actions see [www.pcouncil.org](http://www.pcouncil.org).

If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Deb Wilson-Vandenberg, Research Manager at (831) 649-2892 or Ms. Marija Vojkovich, Offshore Ecosystem Coordinator at (805) 568-1231 of the Department's Marine Region.

Sincerely,



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Regional Manager  
Marine Region

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